

**Architectural and Historical Impact Assessment for the old  
Wesleyan Manse, 3 Mahas Singh Road, Verulam on Lot 206  
Verulam**



*Fig: From Twentieth Century Impressions of Natal: showing mill and Old Manse in the background*

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## **1. Introduction:**

Debbie Whelan of watergate inc. was approached by Mr Kamal Orie of Archipod cc., to carry out an Architectural and Historical Impact Assessment of the site of the old Wesleyan Manse at Verulam. The requirement of the client was to assess the structure with a view towards practical and adaptive reuse, otherwise, complete demolition. The intention of the primary client is the construction of a set of middle income town houses on the site.

The context of this report is the Provincial Heritage Resources Act, no 4 of 2008, which aims to protect heritage resources in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

It is understood that only the structures on Lot 2, comprising the old Manse, and the two associated outbuildings, are to be considered. Should the wood- and- iron building on the adjoining plot, between the old Manse and Ireland road be affected, then this should form part of a separate Heritage Impact Assessment, and a separate application.

## **2. Methodology:**

The site was inspected by Debbie Whelan of watergate inc. on 8 March 2010. The building was empty, and there was no sign of life. The neighbour on the adjoining lot was also visited. He indicated that the old Manse structure was problematic, as it was used by criminals as a refuge at night. On a second site visit, conducted on the 23 April at 7.30 am, people were sleeping in the building.

Aerial images were used, such as Google Earth and the 1937 aerial photographs to establish the context of the site, then and now.

The Provincial Archives Repository and the Killie Campbell Collections were consulted, and the Wesleyan/ Methodist Church contacted in order to establish any parochial worth in the building. With respect to the latter, there was no information forthcoming. Previous schemes carried out by Archipod cc. have been included to indicate an ethos and variety of approach, in terms of retaining the structure on the site.

In addition, the Small Town Survey of Verulam and Canelands as compiled by Professor Walter Peters in 1997 was consulted to establish any local listing of the building. Whereas the Wesleyan Church itself, some distance from the old Manse, is featured and recorded as dating to 1855, the Manse itself does not form part of this record.

Scrutiny of literature on Verulam, the records of Bleek and Robinson and the seminal work by Margaret Park, did not reveal anything of any relevance to the building or its construction. The 1911 official publication *Twentieth Century Impressions of Natal* shows a structure in the background of the old mill, which may be the Wesleyan Manse.

The land registers at the Deeds Office in Pietermaritzburg were scrutinized, establishing an earliest possible date for construction of the Manse. An attempt was made through correlation with the Natal Almanacs of the end of the nineteenth century, to establish personalities in the Wesleyan Church on whom to place a focus, with no result.

### 3. History of old Wesleyan Manse and church

The first Wesleyan Chapel was opened in Verulam in 1851, and it was the first built outside Durban and Pietermaritzburg. Margaret Park says 'It was a strong pole building with clay walls 30 feet long and 16 feet wide inside, and accommodated 100 people. The erection of this chapel so soon after their arrival was much to the credit of the Verulam people as they raised the £40 necessary for its construction through their own efforts, and were therefore able to open this chapel entirely free from debt. This was no easy matter as none of then residents possessed a vast amount of capital, and furthermore they had had a hard time making ends need in the new settlement. This sum of course had not been collected without sacrifice, but it showed how anxious these people were to have a suitable place in which to worship together, and around which to build their settlement. Their religious activities formed the central core of their existence, and from that core radiated every other activity. Services were preached at the opening of the church by Rev. W.C. Holden from Durban in the morning and the Rev. H. Pearse in the evening. Approximately 60 people attended in the morning, and 80 in the evening. On Monday morning at 11 a.m. the Rev. J. Allison preached, and on Monday evening at 5 p.m. a public Tea Meeting was held, at which approximately 60 people were present.' (Park: 1953)

A second church was constructed on the site, of brick and slate, in 1855. With the laying of the foundation stone, 'A sealed bottle containing coins and documents was then deposited together with a memorandum of dates, lists of building committee, principal donors, and other circumstances connected with the proposed erection, which had been read by the Secretary.' (Park;1953)

'In 1859 this building was enlarged by the addition of an adjoining school room, but the chapel erected in 1855 was used until October 14, 1862 when the foundation stone of the present church, designed by H. Waddington was laid during the Synod meetings at Verulam". After the traditional tea-party, the evening began at which £800 were given or promised for the construction of the church. This generous gesture more than speaks for itself. On March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1864, it was completed and opened. "During the ceremonies, the Durban choir 'rendered selections from the Messiah with much effect, to the sole accompaniment of a flute'. J.T. Polkinghorne, who was the Secretary of the Building Fund, reported that the total cost of the building was £1,425 of which £70 had been received as a donation from the African at the Mission Station. T he fact that the outstanding debt of the church only amounted to £65 "speaks volume for the sacrificial giving of these people.' (Park; 1953) Photographs of this church, located in Groom Street in the town itself, are found in Figs 1 and 2. Sadly, the state of repair of the church has much to be desired.



***Figs 1 and 2: the old Wesleyan Church in Groom Street.***

The Manse for this church was constructed on another site altogether, and relatively distant from its church in the town. It was located at the crest of a hill overlooking the town itself.

The history of the site according to the land registers lodged in the Provincial Deeds Office in Pietermaritzburg note the grant of the property. In 1854, the whole of Lot 2 (then known as Lot 168) was granted to Samuel Vickery, which passed onto James Angus in 1864. Two years later, Charles Edwin Symmond purchased the lot, and then in 1876 Subdivision B was transferred into the name of the Wesleyan Mission. It is suspected that the construction date of the house dates back to this alienation of land. A name change was registered in 1915 in the name of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, which remained as such until Group Areas prevailed, and the lot was transferred to Govindasamy Chetty in 1971. Interestingly, Subdivision 3 of Lot 206 was owned by Suruibulee Mahas Singh from 1967 to 1978, hence the name of the access road which gives its name to the current address.



***Fig 3: 1937 aerial photo showing the Manse, the large roof to the left. Note adjoining structure on Lot 205 which has been demolished for apartment buildings. The planting to the graveyard to the south is also prominent and established.***

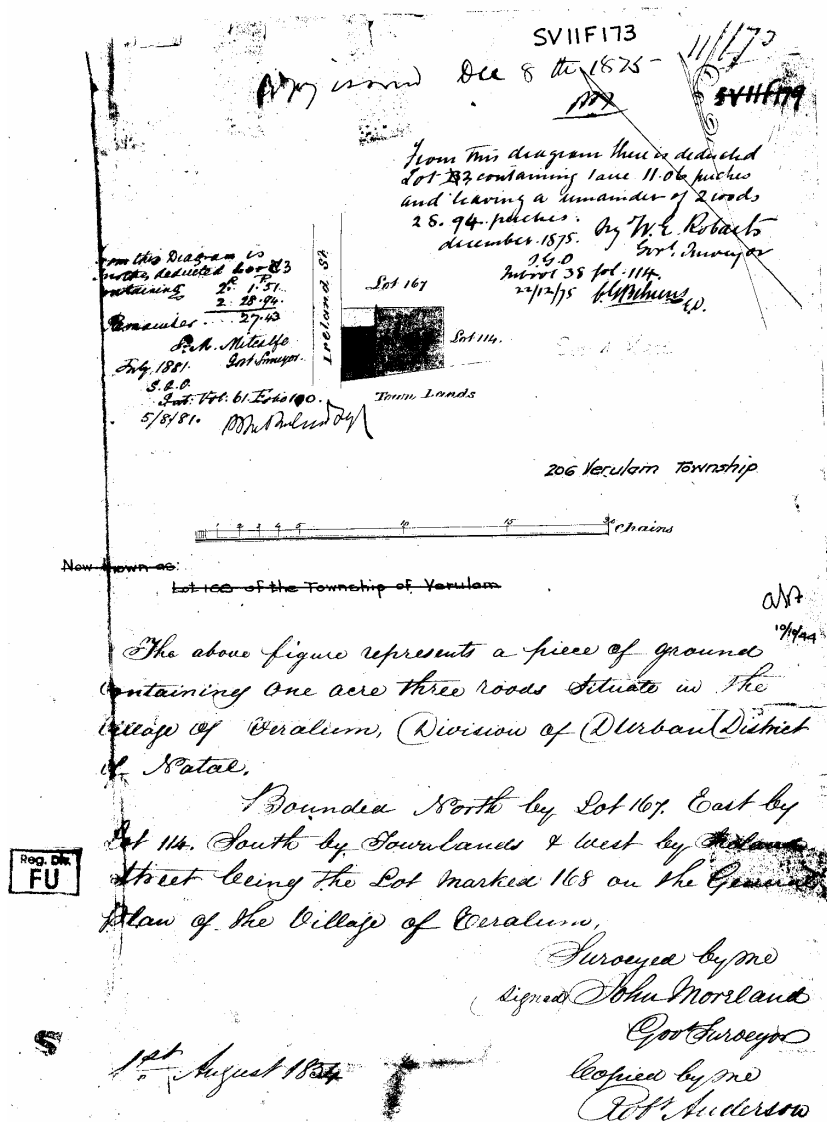
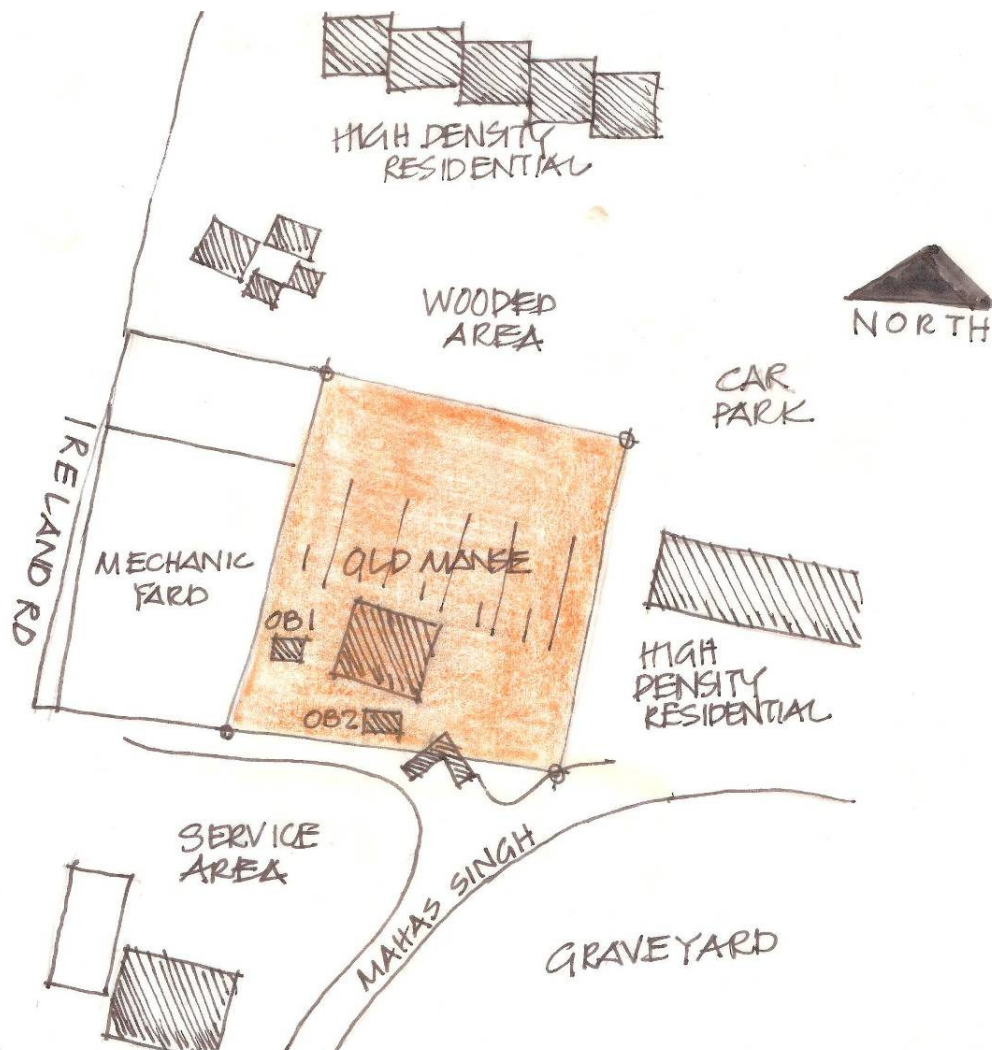


Fig 4: Survey diagram for site 168, dated 1854.



**Fig 5: aerial image superimposing the site boundaries of Lot 206, with the property in question being the central rhomboid shape.**

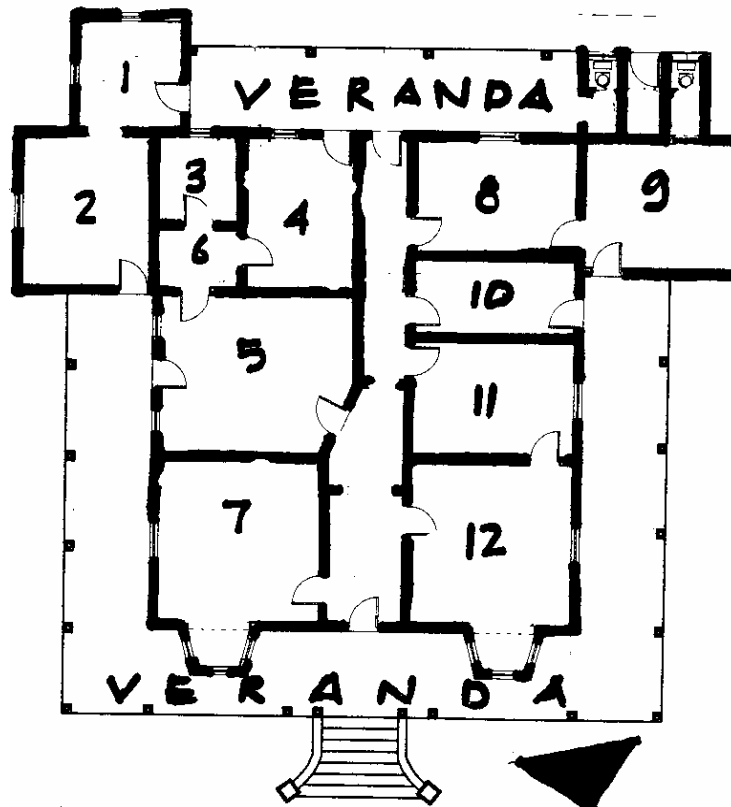
There are three structures on the site, which falls steeply away from the house to the north. The buildings are positioned just below the crest of the hill with the graveyard behind it. This position is characteristic of the classical Victorian veranda house, which had property associated with it. Access is from behind the Petrol Station off Ireland road to the south, and the structure is not prominent from the street, nor does it form part of a streetscape. There is little remaining formal fencing or security to the boundary.

The main house is constructed of brick and mortar, plastered and painted. It is extensive, and covers a footprint of over 380m<sup>2</sup>. It has a fibre- cement sheeting roof, and the verandas to all sides have timber fretwork, painted in green enamel. The structural condition of the house is solid, and there are few cracks. There are no remaining doors or windows, portions of the floor have been lifted, and one section modified to create a makeshift latrine. Large parts of the ceiling have been removed.



The ruinous garage, itemized in Fig 5 above as Outbuilding (OB) 2 behind the main structure at the track entrance, is of brick and mortar of latter-day stretcher course construction. It is not evident on the 1937 aerial photograph.

The second structure, to the east of the main house, is located close by, and is possibly an old carriage house. It is built of brick with a possible mud plaster, and is located under a corrugated sheeting roof.



**Fig 6: plan of house**

#### **4.1 Approach to site:**



**Fig 7: Petrol station on Ireland Road, behind which access to the old Manse house is found.**



**Fig 8: Entrance to graveyard**





***Fig 9: Dirt access road up to crest of hill***



***Fig 10: Fence at rear surrounding graveyard***



***Fig 11: House in relation to dirt road leading to adjoining panelbeater's yard***



***Fig 12: Driveway entrance to old manse-  
note study appurtenance in foreground***



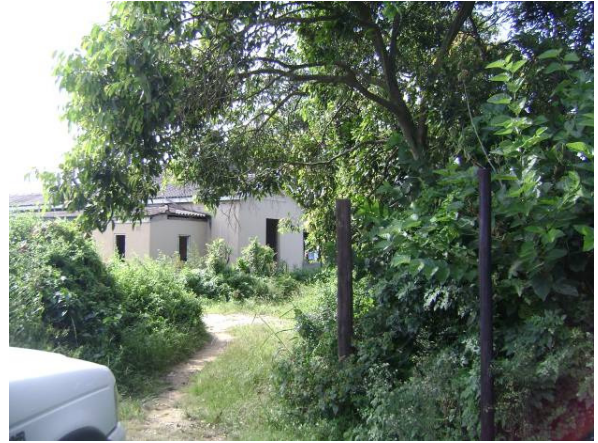
***Fig 13: multiple story structure-  
Lot 205 to the north east***



***Fig 14: view from adjoining panel beaters***



#### 4.2 Site Specific:- external



***Figs 15 and 16 : rear of building showing the back veranda and the study to the left, and the ruins of a garage of more recent construction (outbuilding OB2)***



***Fig 17: showing multi- story development- Lot 208 Fig 18: Eastern veranda***



***Figs 19 and 20: rear of Manse with outbuilding no 1 in the distance***





***Fig 21: view from north***



***Fig 22: missing post north east corner***



***Fig 23: view east along front veranda***



***Fig 24: view along east veranda***



***Fig 25: view from front veranda***



***Fig 26: view back towards OB 1***



***Fig 27: showing clumsy bathroom conversion at rear***



***Fig 28: fibre cement roof, timber***



**Site Specific:- internal**



***Figs 29 and 30: view along interior passage***



***Fig 31: view through bathroom (room 10) to veranda Fig 32: makeshift toilet in room 11***



***Fig 33: view into room 9***



***Fig 34: room 5***



***Figs 35 and 36: ceiling space showing damaged timbers and removed ceilings***





**Fig 37: looking through room 5**



**Fig 38 (right) Room 12**



**Fig 39: outbuilding no 1**



**Fig 40: interior: outbuilding no 1**



**Fig 41: exterior: outbuilding no 2**



## 5. Conclusions:

### Recommendations- Old Manse:

The main building, the old Manse, is of solid construction, having been built possibly as early as 1864 when the land alienation occurred. Certainly the fibre- cement sheeting to the roof is a more recent addition, replacing, given the pitch of the roof, what would have been a corrugated iron roof. It is a good example of a veranda style house typical of its period, and of which there are many similar in a more protected and credible location.

Much of the degradation to the building is through neglect, and its current inhabitants, albeit transitory, have possibly assisted in further demolition through the removal of doors, windows and ceilings for firewood, and modifying the structure to make it usable for them in their current circumstances. The transient nature of these inhabitants is cause for concern in the neighbourhood, as this building, with its total lack of continuous occupation, is described as being problematic by the neighbour running a panel beating business, noting the building as a den for thieves and criminals.

It should be strongly noted that the lack of securing the property is the business of the owner, and that this negligence can be challenged in the light of the Provincial Heritage Resources Act no 4 of 2008.

Little information exists about the building in the archives or relevant literature, and despite its age and former glory, was not listed by Professor Peters in his Verulam - Canelands Survey of 1997. However, this may well have been an oversight given its lush and concealed position.

As the Manse, it was owned by the Wesleyan Methodist Church until 1971 when Group Areas altered the face of the social landscape, and this house passed into private hands. As such, the building is a victim of the apartheid system, as are many of the buildings in Verulam, including the Wesleyan Church itself which is now standing *sans* large portions of roof.

The building has little of its original pastoral context save its elevation and a much altered view. The format of housing in this area has changed measurably, with the need for smaller units rather than large homesteads. This is evident in the multi- story developments which bound on the property, which are already years old.

It is vital to note that this house may contribute to a sense of nostalgia, but its empirical value in its contemporary and much changed location is minimized: surrounded by modernist structures, high density dwellings and light industrial activities, the practicality of its reuse as a primary dwelling is very limited indeed. Its position as part of the urban fabric in the village of Verulam is inscrutable: not only does it not form part of a streetscape, as does its parent church, but there is little to merit its practical rehabilitation through the argument of contributing to the historical landscape. Furthermore, its footprint on the site, together with the topography, makes it difficult to develop the rest of the site in a viable fashion, unless the building becomes an integral part of any new development. The dilapidated state of the Methodist Church and its complex, a public building within an urban fabric and an architecturally temporal context, is more cause for concern.

***It is the opinion of the author, that despite the general structural condition of the building, should practical reuse of the building be deemed to be impractical, that demolition be condoned given its marginalized position economically, socially and geographically.***

<b>Old manse</b>	Local importance	Regional importance	National importance	International importance
Architectural significance	medium	low	low	low
Historical significance	None found	low	low	low
Technical significance	low	low	low	low
Scientific significance	low	low	low	low
Social significance	None found	low	low	low

### **Recommendations: Outbuilding 1**

Outbuilding 1, evident on the 1937 aerial photograph in Fig 1, is possibly an old coach shed. One half was clearly accommodation, given the fireplace (see fig 39). It is of mixed construction, but primarily brick and mortar.

Given its association with the house, and its general condition, its retention is difficult to justify in the context of the above discussion with regard to the house.

***It is the opinion of the author that this structure be demolished should the need arise.***

<b>OB 1</b>	Local importance	Regional importance	National importance	International importance
Architectural significance	low	low	low	low
Historical significance	low	low	low	low
Technical significance	low	low	low	low
Scientific significance	low	low	low	low
Social significance	low	low	low	low

### **Recommendations: Outbuilding 2**

This is a ramshackle shed of recent brick construction. Not much of the mono-pitch corrugated sheeting roof remains.

***It is the opinion of the author that this structure be demolished should the need arise.***

<b>OB 2</b>	Local importance	Regional importance	National importance	International importance
Architectural significance	low	low	low	low
Historical significance	low	low	low	low
Technical significance	low	low	low	low
Scientific significance	low	low	low	low
Social significance	low	low	low	low

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